

Mosaic
Argus Literary and Art Magazine
2020



The Story of Argus

According to Greek mythology, Argus was a giant with one hundred eyes. While some of his eyes "slept," he kept watch with the others. Hermes lulled Argus to sleep with his magic lyre and slew him with a stone. Upon finding the dead Argus, Hera, queen of the Gods, placed his eyes in the tail of a peacock. The cover of Argus traditionally represents this ancient legend handed down to us by the Greeks. The title was chosen to represent the different views and opinions of readers as though each perspective were an eye of the peacock.

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Junior Editor

Acknowledgments

Every year, *Argus* serves as a creative outlet for students to express their thoughts, passions, and talent. Under Student Media and more specifically, the English Department, our art and literary magazine has been operating since its establishment in 1976. Without the students, our organization would not have lasted 44 years, so thank you to those who have submitted their self-created art, photographs, and writing. Next, I would like to express my gratitude towards my staff members, each of whom has played a crucial part of the overall running of *Argus*. To our faculty advisor, Dr. Rebecca Macijeski, I greatly appreciate your gentle guidance and constructive advice throughout this process. A warm thanks to the former Editor-in-Chief, Katie Rayburn who has always happily answered my questions and offered direction. A special thank you to our judges: Jacob Hammer and Daniel Hoefler (co-judges, poetry), Erin Lillo (prose), Anna Macijeski (fine art), and Lené Gary (photography) — all of whom have been critical in determining our winners. Last but not least, thank you to the person reading this right now because your enthusiasm for literature and art creates a space for us to keep producing these editions.

Editor's Note

Emotions often color our thoughts and actions. Feelings can leak into other aspects of our life and have the potential to change how we see that person, event, or situation. But color is good for soul because it reminds us of the diversity that is the human condition. There is a line separating hatred and animosity, sadness and devastation, happiness and euphoria that must be acknowledged. The black outlining the shapes represents a silver lining, obscured by emotional turmoil but buried just below, so once the weight of your emotions lifts, everything comes together in hindsight. It is only when we step back that we see the full picture, a mosaic of pieces comes together, and we start to feel whole. In case no one has told you this, it is okay to get to know yourself in parts, for each reflect a side of you, a different beam of color on the spectrum, a different shade of emotion.

The theme for this edition came to me as I was exploring the advice of one of my mentors and the former Editor-in-Chief of *Argus*, Katie Rayburn who explained how the theme should be broad enough for creative freedom but specific to you. Through this line of advice, I came up with "Mosaic". As a psy-

chology major and someone who finds interest in the complexity of humans, mosaic was on-brand for me. The intricacies of how humans think, feel, and behave can be reflected in the fragments that make up a mosaic. With the theme "Mosaic" in mind, my aim is for submissions to reflect the fragmentation of our human nature and the role of hindsight in seeing the big picture, for it is when we get to know these small parts of us that we begin to truly understand the whole.

Contest Winners

Poetry:

1st place – little dandelion / Krista Hanson

2nd place – Aortic Dissection / Catelyn Errington

3rd place – Potion: Drink Me! / Allie Atkinson

Prose:

1st place – The Things They Taught / Macala Broussard

2nd place – Holding onto Shattered Memories / Melissa Taylor

3rd place – Clothespin / Ruben Smith

Photography:

1st place – Grow / Olivia Slayter

2nd place – French Quarter / Sean McGraw

3rd place – Gaudí's Mosaic / Madison Szekely

Fine Art:

1st place – A Shattered Mirror's Reflection / Layla Easley

2nd place – Plant design / Emily Dawson

3rd place – Roller Skates / Tifphany McClinton

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Preface

The poem you see to the right is by Shay Hope Church, the winner of a contest to be featured in *Argus*. This opportunity was presented to students through a creative writing summer camp held on campus for going on three years. The aim is to assist those between 10 to 17 years old in expressing themselves through a variety of creative genres such as poetry and short stories. The two-week long camp focuses on the importance of utilizing feedback and criticism to improve one's piece and is geared towards helping students discover their style of writing. Shay Hope Church is a 10th grader from Natchitoches Central High School who states her poem "takes you home, whether you're already there or still looking for it."

An Ocean Full of Stars

Shay Church

Scents of lavender prick the air,

lost in a forgotten world

The trees climb above the clouds

Freer than the salt in the ocean.

Homesick from a place that doesn't exist

Lost in daydreams; forgotten in nightthinking

A nostalgic longing to be near again,

A blank space.

The overwhelming feeling of wanderlust

To get lost in space, lose track of time

and escape reality.

Pursue the longing need to cover up with a blanket of stars

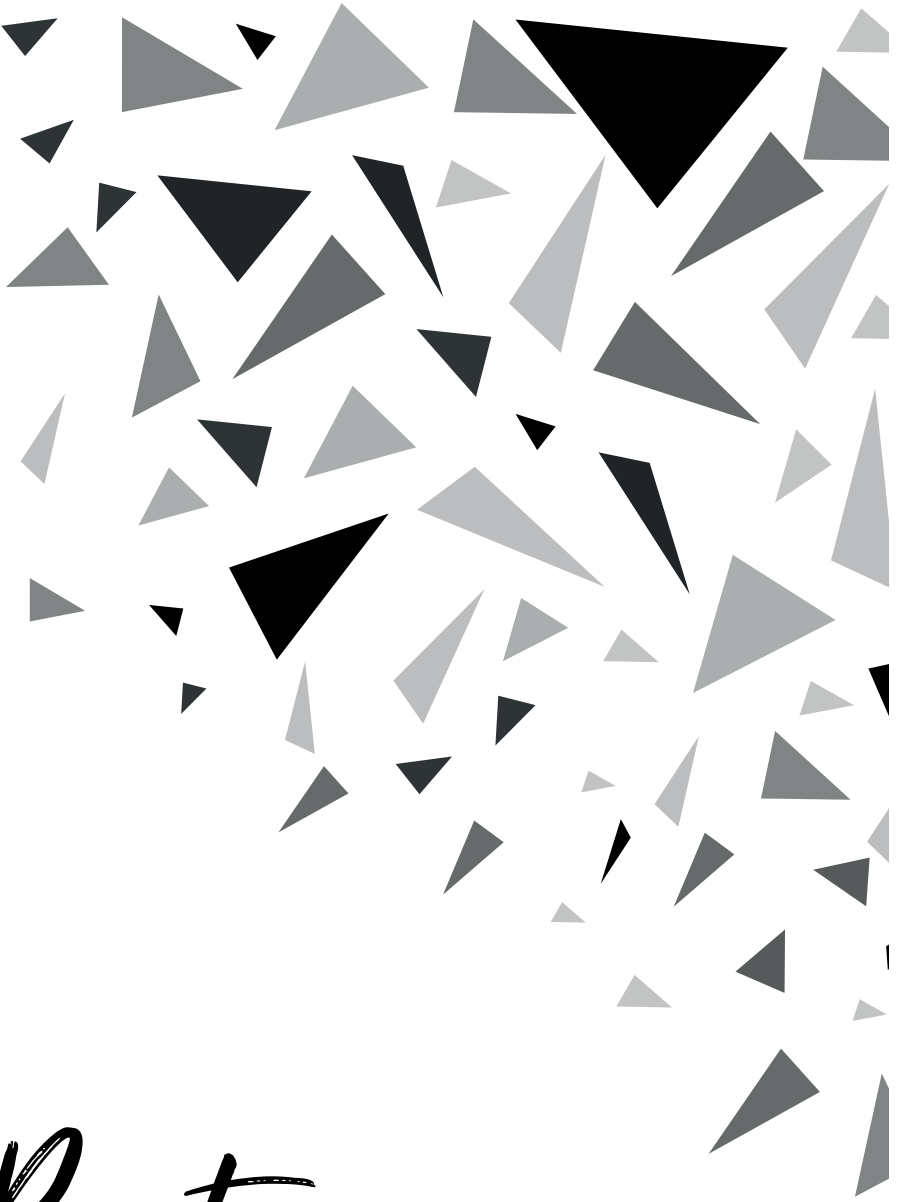
and lose yourself in the wind.

To kiss the moon goodnight

and hug the sun too.

never know what to expect little one,

this journey is all for you.



Poetry

Me and You, We

Allie Atkinson

My troubles travel with the smoke

Thin, wispy, and trailing behind me.

I almost relinquished all hope,

Nowadays, I'm glancing less at the past behind me.

It took a while for me to find *me*

People are kaleidoscopes, colors bleeding onto the eye

Some bright, blinding, staining anything in contact,

Others more muted, blended, taking comfort in

Being one busy body among the bustle of people—

We are mosaics.

It becomes hard to distinguish between the colors and cracks.

No matter how you piece the fragments together,

A prism of colors, shades of emotion, dynamically You.

Growth occurs in all directions

Outwards, inwards... even if the shards

Don't quite fit like they used to

Because of dull edges and unfamiliar scratches,

In the morning, you are the warming glow people call sunrise

And when the night brings in the dark, you are your shadows
too

Still the moonlight gleams in a way that makes you want to
try again

Because you are inexplicably, indescribably You.

Purple Heart

Mack Lacy

The walls of a hospital room are no longer painted in white
fluorescence,

But his hands shake just the same.

It's his first day sitting up,

Five days of forced reclination, and

The stutter of Life is accentuated by the click of injected
morphine.

The forced breathing remains consistent.

Sometimes he tries to speak:

Lips pursed, out, in, out, twisted against gums, tongue, the
roof of his maw,

but the air chokes in his throat;

His words dissipate like

wisps of wind-swept steam

almost immediately after he hisses them out.

His eyes are blank, silver encroaching upon brown,

And I always thought that the silver lining was supposed to
be a Good Thing,

But he can barely see Me,

And he can't hear Me, either.

His heart jolts in his chest.

I count them by the seconds.

For five seconds, the pulse sits stagnant at 88.

On the sixth, it jumps to 122 and he wheezes,

claws clutching the arms of the leather recliner, and

His shoulders jostle because there's nothing else to do

but grab his Life by the throat and hang on, and

Death grows impatient with each defibrillation.

He doesn't know what to do with a wasted vessel.

He sits and waits and that's all he does and can do.

"This is what I was afraid of," he says,

"I'm going to die here," he says,

and I say nothing outside of "I'm sorry"

and He doesn't respond.

His Purple Heart sits on my dresser, collecting dust,
His Red Heart doesn't pump correctly,
And They are one in the same.



There's Hope Past Grief and Trauma
Kailyn Frederick

Veins of Gold

Evander McQuilling

There are different ways
Of dealing with broken hearts
Pottery.

Some throw it away,
Tired of shards and cuts
Tired of the memory
Of being shattered.

Some hide it away,
Dark corners,
Dark drawers,
Not willing to part,
But not willing to remember.

Some fix the break,
Using glue to piece it back together,
Trying to hide the cracks,
But always knowing
That faint line they tried to erase.
But there are some
Who take what has been broken
And fix it with gold.

Kintsugi

Golden Joinery

Kintsukuroi

Golden Repair

Repairing a break

With lacquer and gold

Silver and platinum,
Showing the breaks
As the history of the object.

To take what was beautiful before
And to make it beautiful again.
This is the beauty
Of these people
Of this craft.

To take something
That would be thrown aside
And make it a work of art.

So when I give my broken pieces to you
Once whole and since shattered,
I pray that you are the last,

The one to find the beauty in the breaks,

And fill in the spaces with the gold of your love



Love of Segovia
Madison Szekely

Inner Thoughts and Other Notes I Have Saved on My Phone

Trinity Velazquez

My heart is worth infinite honest love.

I will always offer the kind of love that is pure and unconditional, is that a bad thing?

In order to fall back in love with my life, I have to let go of certain things that I'm wasting my precious energy on.

I really need to learn when I'm being taken advantage of and when to walk away from people who aren't appreciating me.

Trinity, know when to walk away. You're getting yourself in too deep.

You stop attracting certain people when you heal the parts of you that once needed them.

Let them get a tree without you.

Remember to buy bread and cinnamon roll oatmeal.

Stop stressing, don't think about it.

But fundamentally, you have the same problem: you don't know how to make someone other than yourself a priority.

I didn't realize that falling in love with you, meant falling out of love with myself.

Love that we cannot have is the one that lasts the longest, hurts the deepest, and feels the strongest.

My head and heart are constantly at odds. I am always fighting between what I feel and what I know is reality.

How am I falling in love with you while my heart feels like it is breaking?

Stop telling parents things, just keep everything to yourself.

Maybe it is time I harden my heart. It might do me some good.

God, I am so glad this is all over. It's over, life can be peaceful again. No more drama.

Everything is gonna be okay, I can get through this.

Don't buy the toothpaste that tastes like washed-out mint.



Woman's Face
Tiffany McClinton

For A

Garrett Ambrose

If your past has held hardships

Fraught struggles and choking breaths

I wish for your future to be kind

I would like for time to be gentle

If I could, I would smooth your past

Press gentle fingers to your history book

Rewrite every page to suit you

But that would change *you*, and I adore you

If there is anyone in this world who deserves

A soft epilogue, an easy descent

It is you

Glorious, gorgeous you

I would be Joan of Arc for you

I would tie your banner to my wrist

And use your name as a battle cry

Though you need no champion, and I am not much of one

Devotion is a strange thing

And my loyalty may waver some day

But for now

(and ever, in any capacity)

You have me.

Endlessly.

Ardently.

You have me.

The Limitations of Wax

Garrett Ambrose

I am tired of breaking my own heart

Hopes and dreams pinned above my head

As Icarus once looked to the sun

If only that the last thing he saw before he sank to the sea

Was the bright, blue sky

I am a hunter eyeing my own silhouette

Through the scope of a rifle of my own imagining

Self-sabotage

In an overly complicated metaphor

And my hands do not tremble as I pull the trigger

If I were a wiser, better man

I would admit to myself that self-hatred

Is the gasoline to fuel my engine

But instead I wind myself up and watch me go

Only to bring a hammer down

Scattering tin wreckage across my self-image

If I could learn

To run on ambition instead of frustration

I wonder how far into the sun I could fly

Reaching and grasping the unattainable goal

Or if the wax wings affixed to my spine

Would snap me in half like kindling

A memorial of man's hubris

A parable for the limitations of wax.

Your Poetry

Catelyn Errington

I listen for meter in your speech

And metaphor, like hard candy,

Sitting beneath your tongue.

You are poetry to me.

What should poetry be,

Besides the warmth in your eyes

Or the calluses upon your palm?

They tell the story much better than I,

Illuminated only by fluorescent light

And the thought of you

You are a simile—like or as

The universe—impossibly consequential,

Ever-present, enveloping, labyrinthine.

And I am just the exclamation point,

Emphasizing all that you are, all that I wish to be

I have spent hours on your analysis,
Studying your diction and your themes,
Feeling your mood and tone,
But I cannot assert your meaning to me
I have read each line a thousand times,
Only to draw a million different conclusions
Perhaps this is what your poetry means to say:
You are everything to be lost and gained,
You are everything to be seen and heard,
You are everything to be near and far,
But beyond your everything-ness?
There lies a soul too infinite to be known

Atlas Shrugged

Garret Ambrose

Atlas bore the weight of the world

Pressed his hands to the seas

Cried effort into the mighty deserts

Lifted mountains upon his shoulders

The sky above his head

I, thousands of years later, see a statue

A man, brass globe upon his back

Stoic acceptance on his face

And my heart catches in my chest

For surely this man must be divine

I lift a miniscule world upon my back

A population of one

Which is very hard to keep track of

I am in charge of shaky, ink-stained fingers

And really quite terrible teeth

Chewed up glasses

A candy red my mother hates

The scars of a tendency which has marked me

A brain that does not process numbers

A heart that trods steadily along

I am the master of a million thousand aspects

In the minutiae of a single citizen

Whom I really can't say I like

Whom I am certain

I do not love

But it is my burden to bear

A planet to curl my spine under

And to ask me to surrender what pains me

Would be to ask me to kill myself

So I will keep going steadily onward

Regal under that crushing brass globe

Carrying it on into the breathless future

Until one day the weight is a crown

And to bear myself is no burden

Dumbshow

Catelyn Errington

The curtain's up, it's showtime!

The merry masquerade has commenced--

Complete with unconquered complacency,

Which knows no bounds from stage to crowd

You cannot sweat the makeup off once it's been applied

And you cannot leave your seat until intermission.

Your hands tremble, holding the playbill,

It's soaked through with sweat and doubt

Though the words inside advertise a comedy,

The lurching in your gut implies tragedy.

The actors laugh on stage, they hug and they kiss,

But the tears running down their painted cheeks

Shimmer, solemnly, in the shining stage lights.

Cease your pretending, your pretentious play-acting!

Don't you know what's at stake?

If you make a funny face, it'll freeze like that

And if you tell a lie, you can't take it back

Doesn't your costume itch?

Isn't your corset laced too tight?

Where is it that you've drawn the line?

Or has it blurred too much, beyond distinction?

Can you discern fact from fiction?

Or have you been cemented into an Elizabethan production,

An infernal hell of your own design,

And when it finally descends into ember and ash,

Do you intend to let your patrons burn with you?

Broken Glass

Jada Boyd

I am glass

Cool and smooth on the surface

Shining and gleaming brighter than a solar flare

Glass is fragile, it should be protected with casing

But this piece of glass is on its own now

One fracture and everything shatters

Rocks as heavy as solid concrete and made of fears pile on
top of me

I can handle 10 rocks, I can handle 50

But the pressure of 1,000 rocks on one slim, small piece of
glass can be too much

to bear

Tiny, ugly, black cracks in the surface

Appear

Faint crunching sounds can be heard

If you listen closely

Crying out for help

The cracks get bigger, making the surface

Rough with their jagged lines all the way

through my fingers and toes

My once flawless face is reduced to slabs

of crystal

People tell me don't break

They tell me to hide the fractures

I break anyway

Sharp, broken pieces of glass scatter on the cold, hard floor

They try to put the pieces back together

They try to restore it to the perfect,

smooth glass they want it to be

Argus

But no matter how many times they try to fix it on the surface

The glass will always be broken



Through
Olivia Slaytor

I Am The Elephant

Catelyn Errington

I am the elephant

In the middle of the room.

You wouldn't dare say it

But I know the words are there,

Precariously perched,

On the tip of your tongue,

Seconds away from dropping

Like the atom bomb.

A last resort for some,

But others are eager to pull the trigger

And say the unthinkable,

But how unthinkable is it really?

I see the looks, the eyes, the stares

Peeling back my layers.

Does she know?

She does.

A hand on my arm is a threat

To the secret beneath my skin.

No, please don't touch me there

You're not supposed to know.

And please don't feed me lies

I can't stomach them anymore.

Your words cannot straighten a funhouse mirror

Nor can they tighten the buckle of my belt

Tell me, which number on the scale

Determines how much I'm worth?

Do I add or subtract my dress size?

Was that one X or three?

I suppose I'll take my pills and teas

And spend my days in shapewear

Begging for the love they told me I don't deserve.

Specimen
Chloe Blank

What defines me won't define anyone else
So I guess that's why it's so hard to see through
This murky water from the bottom of a lake
I guess that's why living with myself
Is a pill I must take and
I guess that's why my family looks at me like an hourglass
That's just been given a shake
Like my time is running out
Like I'm some temporary thing
Like I'm a pest that needs to be stomped
I guess that's why when I look at my face
I get confused because the surface of who I am
Makes much more sense than the algae
I guess that's why when my clothes don't fit again and again
I feel better because at least something is changing

At least something notices I'm becoming anything at all

At least something can take part in my process of being

At least something doesn't yell at me for being too quiet

I guess it's better to define myself as water

Or anything moving because

I'm alone

So, I guess that's why the bottom of a murky lake

Is much more appealing

Than bobbing to the top and seeing

Nothing

Recover

Myjoycia Cezar

Do you ever think about the things that have caused you to get where you are?

The turning points, the well-taken advices, the breakdowns?

They snowball into one mass making you appreciate the struggles you have gone through.

The tears . . . were worth it.

The stress . . . was worth it.

The feeling of drowning under multitudes of problems

With no one to offer the life jacket of a solution, somehow . .
. was worth it.

And it all added up.

The lessons were learned.

But there is something more.

Now, what is the next step?

How do I recover?

Recover from the negative, angry thoughts that fueled me
for so long

And *grow*.

Because if there was no growth, what was it for?

I *must* grow and surpass.

It is the only thing left to do.

It will be *taxing*,

But it will be worth it.

And soon, maybe I will realize . . . *I* am worth it.

Potion: Drink Me!

3rd place

Allie Atkinson

I get drunk off what ifs

And drink down to the last drop of dreams,

But I become exhausted and sleep again

While a wide-awake world passes by me.

I don't know why it seems

I was cursed to never be a part of both worlds.

One is tugging, begging me upon the shore

As waves lap against the grains, the bits of memories

Sprinkled here just to be unsettled when I come back...

I always come back.

My knees kiss the sand, I exhale a shaky breath

Salt rattles in my lungs, sand seeps between my fingers

As I try to grasp what was never mine

This sand does not belong to me

These memories no longer do anything for me

So I turn them over to the shore.



The Sky
Aubrey Howell

*your car smells like you but it also kind of smells like
dirt*

Kirsten Gunnier

an unforeseen departure

ripped away like flowers from a garden

only for them to rot on a forgotten windowsill

this is simply a new incarnation of a tale as old as time

instead of a hermit-turned-husband

all you are left with are moths where your heart should be

a coffin of distance separates you from the ones you love

this one is just the final nail to seal it shut

somehow worse than the ultimate end

you know they are somewhere, existing where you are not

a selfish notion, but nonetheless

imagine a grand reunion

filled with golden warmth and beaming joy

a time where everything will fall back into place

and the static in your mind becomes clear again

refrain from harboring trivial sentiments

for out of these feelings, resentment emerges

poisoning the image of the very person you mourn

turning your head against a fabricated enemy

surging from a place deep in your heart

spreading a current of darkness where there once was light

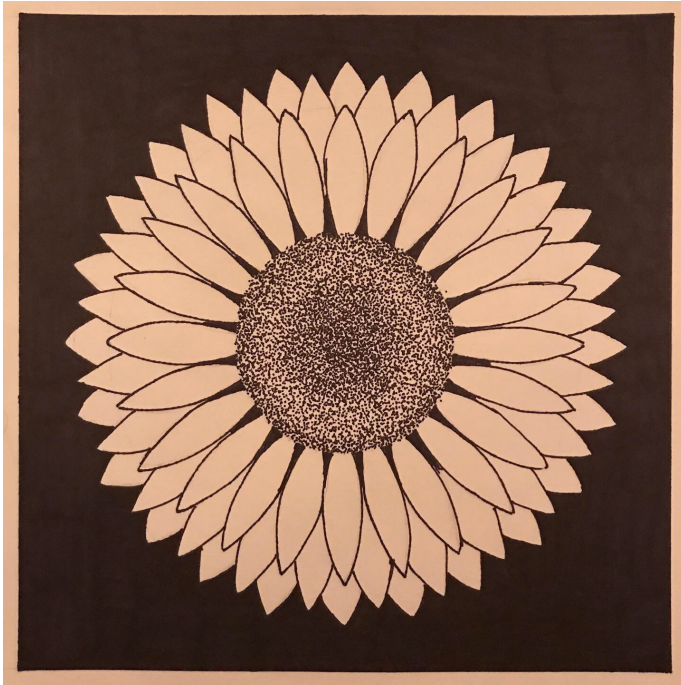
the universe is your opposition

sorrow its devoted companion

time is your only solace

smoothing out the sharp edges of your pain

until it can finally be grasped and hurled far away
making ripples in a pond of stagnant memories



Sunflower
Finnley Plaster

Peaches and Lemons

Amira Moussa

I was a lemon,

Sour and bitter

She was a peach,

Warm and sweet,

I was bright and fun at first,

She fell in love and I strung her along,

She fell hard,

I did too,

But lemons don't bruise,

Like peaches do,

She was warm,

I was sour,

She didn't care,

For she loved me better.

*The Islanders Falling off the Edge of the World and No
One Caring*

Ruben Smith

all claws that dig deep into the marsh,

the white man came with his oil drills, his tankers, his digging
machines,

that rusty metal biting a hole in the lush green.

all destruction is elemental and natural,

they dug deep channels for no fish to swim, except their
pipes of sludge,

chaotic clusters of forgotten freshwater pools.

all swirling gray masses that move fast,

the white man came to decimate the land with as much force
as hurricanes,

diluted orange water and wishful prayers.

all fingers scraping up the world below,

they shaped land with their own hands, their own devices of
energy and mass,

not even the gods would be proud of the work.

all decaying houses on stilts silently rest,

the white man came to move the people who remained to a
new plot of land,

yet nothing moves at night except the murky water.

these are the native people,

humble homes of togetherness and shadows and boards,

yet they are threatened by man-made nature.

they should cling to the vines that they have climbed for so
long,

feel the tide against their coarse, dry skin,

and know that their land is stolen away

by anything

that walks.

Window Shopping

Chloe Blank

Today I don't know but tomorrow
I'll find a chance to understand how
Or why it is when I dance in this room
With no one to watch and nothing to lose

I feel infinitely free
This need to breathe deeply
An undeniable language between me
And my aching feet

I hope for a day when someone sees
Through the window out by the beach
That they feel just as carefree
Whether or not they laugh at me

I wonder if maybe that day
Or perhaps that night, when I walk away
From that window they see
Where they watch me pretend to be free

I wonder if maybe the person
Would remember that I do it for them
That I dance to make them smile
I wonder if they'll dance with me

Aortic Dissection

2nd place

Catelyn Errington

I paint my hands in glue,

Tracing the divets and whorls

With thin layers,

Sticky, milky lines.

I watch it dry, slowly.

The white fades clear

And gives my fingertips

A dull sheen.

Nails beneath the edge,

Anxious to pull, to peel,

To tear away the film

Veiling my blushing palm

Like a band-aid.

But, the funny thing about

A band-aid is that

Even though it covers
And hides the hurt
It does not dull the pain.
Perhaps, if I sink my heart in glue,
And let it dry clear,
I can rip it off,
And maybe,
The ache will come with it
And I will wrap it in tissue
And toss it in the trash.
But camouflage is not a cure
Nor is heartbreak a gash
That can be sewn shut
And slathered with ointment
So that it won't leave a scar.

Fragments, Reborn

Carly Chandler

Shards of me

Strewn 'round the room

Pick myself up and hide it away

Broken and lost and fragmented

Fragments

Fragments of what I was,

Who I used to be

A pile of glass,

of personality

Shards of a smile

Crack across my face

All the pieces I hide away

Chip away at what I was

Reborn

A new day, a new life

A smile made new

Fragments pieced together,

Me, reborn, a mosaic of me

Forgetting (To Remember)

Chelsea Beasley

Mustard oozing out

Making that sound kids laugh at

Drip

Drip

Dropping onto the bread

Preparing sandwiches

You're reminded of her

Dancing in the summer rain

Drip

Drip

Dropping into your life

With suddenness and extreme that you never could have
prepared for

Fixing two glasses of sprite,

Because it is her favorite and therefore yours as well

Drip

Drip

Dropping into the cups

But mostly onto the floor

Clear as day you see her

Laughing as you try to clean up and somehow make it worse

Tears squeezing between the smile lines

Drip

Drip

Dropping into open hands

Staring at the plates and glasses and silverware

Not quite sure what to do when she is gone

And the table is just for you



Leyendecker Study-Vacation
Tiffany McClinton

Facade

Marilyn Brooks

It's easy to go with the crowd, to fit in

To force yourself to conform to the norm

It's harder to tread alone

To go along to the beat of your own drum

To let go of what is expected of you and become the best
you

I know because I'm one of you

I'm the one who sits alone

I'm the one who listens to the beat of my own drum

Sometimes that beat is a classical song

Making me feel wrong from blasting a wordless song

Looking at me like I was wrong

But if only you knew, how it felt to be free

Living life to make yourself happy

Thinking for yourself and never letting anyone else gas you

up or put you down

Creating your own crown

Never making yourself one of the crowd that makes fun of
others—

Behind their backs but never to their face

They wait until you walk away and erase you from their case

Then find someone else to fit into your place

Little did you know, you'd be the one pleading your case

Playing face and trying to create a façade that you were just
like the rest

Erasing your individuality so that you can start blaring things
with the best

Putting down the rest and pretending that all along you were
the best

So, you put on a façade and pray to God

A Fickle Fire

Allie Atkinson

Like the flicker of a flame, you were gone.

I'm not one to deny responsibility

I know I sparked your fire,

But I liked your inviting glow.

When I felt what it was like to get burned

Your fiery passion was no longer charming

And just as quick, your absence hit me.

Open palms, I try to find my way through the night

For a light always cuts clear into the darkness

Everything feels like empty space since you left

I miss your ember, ever near, kissing me with warmth

A fire can be re-lit, but one's heart is a fickle thing.

The way crackling wood leaves ashes in its wake

Portrait of Expression

Macala Broussard

This canvas is smooth to the touch

Only roughened by the severity of my strokes

Red from my love

Blue from my sadness

Purple from my pain

I find control in how I express my feelings

This conduit will say more than I ever could

Through writing

Through sound

Through brushstrokes

This paper knows more about me than anyone who feels

they know all

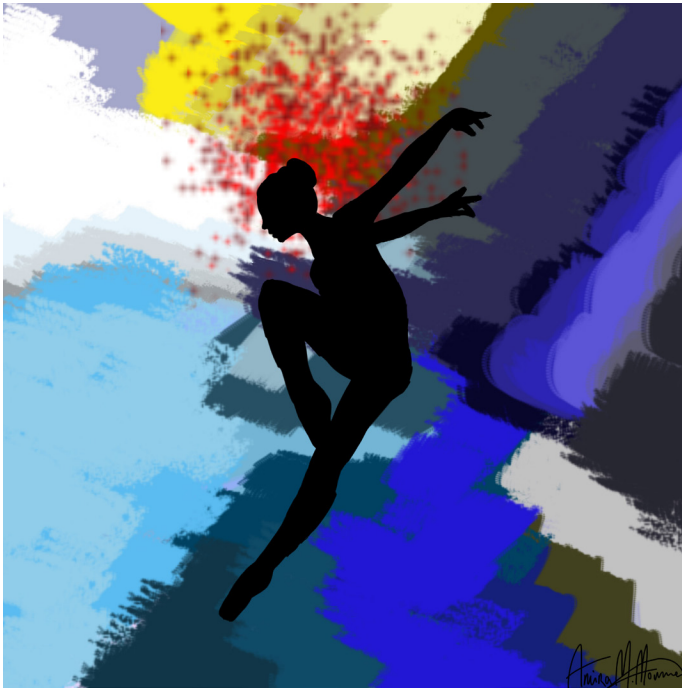
This canvas is my novel

It is my mouthpiece

It is my art

It is me

I paint myself as who I wish I could be



The Dancer
Amira Moussa

little dandelion

1st place

Krista Hanson

Mother [verb] : bring up (a child) with care and affection.

Under my mama's bed sat treasure boxes,

full of things I'll never understand.

Her small television played the cooking channel,

recipes I promised I'd remember, but always forgot by morning.

Her backyard was a forest of magical plants;

a stone path led me home every time.

To a sunroom that made watching the rain easy.

I met bees in her front yard and was told,

"don't chase them, honey."

But they were my first friends.

A woman I never saw as anything less than beautiful.

I was six years old.

My mama took us to Home Depot,

I picked out my own little plant:

a single dandelion in a purple pot.

They say dandelions are weeds.

Not meant to be watered or cared for.

But I loved my dandelion.

That summer,

she promised

to take care of my flower.

The next summer she was gone.

I was nine years old.

Christmas Eve in a motel room.

I opened presents,

too young to even understand my own emotions.

I was just happy she came.

Christmas: I cried as she drove away.

Three states and a million miles.

Before she left,

she promised

to come back.

I haven't seen her since.

Hindsight is 20/20 and I am no longer blind.

But I am seventeen,

looking in the mirror to see a carbon copy of my mama.

A forest sits in my backyard,

yet I still dream of that dandelion.

A real roof sits above my head,
but I still go back to nights under a tin roof, making music with
the clouds.

I am seventeen but,
sometimes,
I'm still just six years old.

Not yet sure what's the difference between my mama and a
mother.

Potential

Myjoycia Cezar

We, as humans, have the power to change.

We all have the opportunity to reinvent,

But do we allow ourselves?

For days, months, years,

We go in circles: around different problems, around different people.

We adhere to such a pattern that we create an orbit.

Systematic yet ever-capable of changing,

We circle around planets and stars of a unique solar system that only wants to teach us.

And around we go,

Hoping and striving to change course until we finally do.

Somehow, throughout our journey, we still hold potential.

Potential to change how we think and how we travel through
this universe.

The job, then, lies in orbit

Because there is a choice to make: to shift course or stay the
same.

Given the opportunity,

Will you let yourself grow?

Working to improve,

What will you accomplish?

With the capacity and potential to change,

Will you?

Her

Kathleen Hilliard

It's nights like these

Where we are in the same car, and the street lights

Guide me like a map across her body

A face shrouded in shadow

Illuminated to show soft lips smiling at something someone
said

Eyes glinting a green like the emerald ocean that calls to me

The waters wetting my ankles and sinking me into that gritty
sand, tugging me into a world of emotions too strong to de-
scribe in one

Word

Her eyes promise me that like the ocean she'll stay for a while

Lights continue to discover more

A t-shirt that's worn and faded, contrasting coffee-milk skin
that's lit by a yellow light

Too yellow to be the sun,

But more so the yellowing of an old book that's curled up with stories

And they hold a mystery in the faded ink that makes me never want to stop exploring more

Guides me across jeans that barely hug each curve and angle,

Fading ever so insignificantly and

Everything is

Over with a worn blue sneaker that's made its home nightly by my bed, beautiful in their imperfection

The boundaries of my streetlight map stop and repeat once, twice, three times across her

And I think and I wonder how lucky I am that God

Led me to this beautiful woman

Her.

Garden Bench

Krista Hanson

I am made of memories.

I remember them all.

But to you, I am just there.

Just the background of your thoughts.

You come to me on a mosaic path.

Stones, building blocks to your memoir.

I see the flowers blooming and the birds learning to fly.

I see your first kiss and awkward photos before prom.

I am here as the grass is cut and the hedges are trimmed.

I was there when you wanted to experience nature.

I was there for that first weekend with mom after the divorce.

I was always here.

I will always be here.

With my chipping paint and giraffe-spotted tree.

I will see the flowers bloom and the leaves fall once again.

I am just the background.

But, don't worry, I don't mind.

I will still be here.

I will see as she makes a promise to always be yours.

I will see as your kids become more and more like you.

I will still be here when your hair turns grey and your memories
fade away.

I will be here as a backdrop in the story of your life.

A Call to Art

Myjocyia Cezar

Away,

Pull us away.

From this complicated and demanding life.

Tell us a story.

Show us . . . a new reality.

Let us into a world unknown.

For it is what helps this world continue,

And it is what we long for.

The narratives, parables, and allegories:

They gift us with truths.

And these truths inspire.

They take root, and produce forests

Of craft, creation, and love.

Art, we beg you,

Listen to our calling:

Pull us away. Inspire us,

And we will create.



The Mandela Effect

Julia Theriot

i am beauty
Kristina Simon

art

is sprinkled on my face

in laugh lines

crooked teeth

and bushy brows

some are confused when they study me

they do not see why he treasures me

but some art

is not meant

for everyone

What If?

Myjoycia Cezar

What if?

What if it all comes crashing down?

All the time, work, and effort.

I spend all this time planning for the road that lies before me,

But what if I never get there?

What if the things I have are not what I need to succeed?

What if who I am is not what is wanted?

These thoughts, these questions:

They begin as doubts

And along the journey, they transform into fuel.

They ignite into a feeling that only strives for more:

More time, more work, more effort.

And the only viable option left is to at least attempt

Argus

Because there is no "what if"

If I do not even try.



Olan
Olivia Slayter

weaving colors

Kristina Simon

my mind is spinning

twirling

into a woven tapestry of thoughts

the blankets of my past self used to be in dark colors

gray color palettes

and bland beginnings

but the tapestries made when my mind is on you

are full of vibrant colors

colors i did not know i could remember

now here i am

spinning webs more beautiful than a spider's silk

there you are

admiring the artwork and validating the colors i have chosen

Argus

your heart

has made my heart form masterpieces

that no one can comprehend

except us



*Valloid's Oldest
Madison Szekely*

Muse

Allie Atkinson

My muse, my newfound love

I can forever get lost in

The folds and grooves of your mind,

For there is so much to know.

And how lovely it is

To get to know someone who knows oneself.

Well enough to pick and pry windows open

Of the dustiest of corners— filled

With what we rather ignore, not acknowledge, not admit

But you—you let the daylight in

And so you know yourself better than anyone else.

I am my own muse; I suggest you be your own, too.

untitled

Kathleen Hilliard

Breathing doesn't always feel good.

Sometimes it hurts and aches and makes me want to
scream.

I can't scream, though, because screaming takes air and
that hurts to breathe in.

It scares me sometimes how much I wish I couldn't.

How much the darkness that corrupted my smile made me
feel I shouldn't breathe.

This darkness forced from within me a writhing and feeble
mess of a girl.

Someone who apologized for anything that could be bad

Someone who pathetically curled her shoulders up in de-
fense

Someone who wanted to just stop the beat
beat

beating so the numbing pain is over.

The furious fires of blackened anger

And actions that left behind scars

Burned and smothered me until
My lungs filled with smoke
And
It hurt to breathe.

I remember how it felt emerging from the ashes and smoke,
The soot covering my eyelashes and peppering the freckles
on my face.

I looked up and saw light,
Something of pure promise.

It wasn't angry, or chastising

It was soft and warm and gave me a smile.

Gentle hands swept the grime and muck of the writhing girl
from before,

Letting the dirt stain the ground below me.

This warmth and happiness let me soar

To be someone who could be herself shamelessly

Someone who knew love was okay to receive.

Someone who saw it was okay to love.

Breathing feels incredible now.

I want to breathe.

I want to run in sunlight and scream, begging air to fill my
lungs.

Piece by Broken Piece

Emeri Manasco

Impact... Cracks immediately spreading across a hundred directions.

Shattered... Falling in a million crumbled pieces all over the floor of our hearts.

The breaking... It's funny how life has a *not-so-funny* way of breaking us at times,

In more pieces than we knew we were made of.

Yet, every crack revealing something deeper

Of our fragility, our resilience, our strength.

Every break revealing something new,

Something we didn't even know we had.

You see I find that, as with most things in this life,

It's not our strengths that need to be displayed,

But our weaknesses.

For our weaknesses help create the backdrop for something greater,

Something much greater than what we had in mind before *the breaking*.

You see, *the breaking* breaks us free from the limitations of our own expectations.

So many times, we have these certain expectations for ourselves,

These goals, these standards, these specific plans we must live up to.

Yet, they suddenly get wrecked by *the breaking*...

By loss, heartache, change, doubt, disappointment, tragedy...

The breaking is anything that crushes the intent of your being
Into more fragments than you knew could ever exist.

The breaking is anything that challenges everything you once knew to be true.

The breaking is uncomfortable, painful, difficult, messy, and honestly, unbearable at times.

I know this far too well...

But, dear friend, what if I told you the breaking was *necessary*?

What if I told you the breaking wasn't for your brokenness, as much as it was for your beauty?

What if I told you that all of the good things you love about your life—

Your color, vibrancy, perspective, and light—

Couldn't exist without the breaking?

What if I told you that it was the breaking that showcased your beauty?

Your rough edges that outlined your image?

Your jaggedness that revealed your wholeness?

What if I told you that somehow, all of the brokenness in your life—

All of the things you wish were different,

All of your hurt, disappointment, confusion, shame, and unanswered questions—

What if they all came together to create something beautiful,

Something extraordinary even...

More extraordinary than your expectations could have ever dreamed of imagining?

What if I told you that you weren't broken, but that you were whole?

And that you were only whole *because* of your brokenness.

Because all along the way, what you thought was *the breaking*, was actually *the building*...

The building of a mosaic. Piece by broken piece,

Building the mosaic of... you.

Constructing the mosaic of your heart, your mind, your character, your story, *yourself*.

Your *beautifully broken* self,

Piece by broken piece.

An abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous triangles of various sizes and orientations. The triangles are rendered in three shades: black, dark gray, and light gray. They are scattered across the upper two-thirds of the page, creating a dynamic and fragmented visual effect. Some triangles are large and prominent, while others are small and subtle, contributing to a sense of depth and movement.

Prose

Where I Should Have Known

Rhiannon Lee

"So, you're going to South Korea now?"

I feel my mouth go dry, and I can't help but pick at the ends of my denim sleeves.

"Only for a year," I tell him, stumbling over my words. "I mean, that's how long a contract would be for, so—"

"But why not Japan? You make more money there." I can tell from his voice that he's

trying to remain calm, but the tightening grip he has on the steering wheel tells otherwise. But, I won't let his obvious aggravation make me back down.

"Um... actually, no. Incorrect. You make more money in Korea. No one ever goes there, so they pay more." His eyes, for once, remain on the road as he takes in my words. I purse my lips, blatantly staring at him as the streetlights blink over us, repeatedly casting blinking shadows over his face. "Does that *really* annoy you?" I can't help but ask. I know the answer,

but I need to hear him say it. Like so many things, I just need him to *say it*.

But, he falls silent. He just keeps driving, and I just keep staring. The smell of cheap Chinese food floats off the both of us as edgy alternative rock fills the air.

I don't know what this feeling is that bubbles up inside of me. Defiant anger? Defensive aggravation? All I know is my stomach is in knots, and I'm just... fed up. What is this? Why is he so mad? I finally look out the window, watch as we skirt along the edge of the Red River. Lights from the casino boats twinkle along the black surface, resembling the stars that are impossible to see due to all the light pollution. A few stragglers walk along Clyde Fant Parkway, out to practice their different vices. I suppose we all are out here to do things not good for us...

When he finally takes in a breath, my head snaps back around to face him.

"You should go to Japan," he states simply, as if that's the end of it. "I can follow you there. I could just stay with my uncle there... I can't follow you to Korea." That feeling inside me

sinks, pierced through by that pitiful little whine in his voice I had grown to adore throughout high school.

"Even if I go to Korea," I try to say, consoling him lamely, "it's a long way away. I still need to graduate, and plus! It's only an hour's flight. You could still live in Japan, and we could, I don't know, fly to see each other? It'd be better than you staying here and me being there."

It's probably wishful thinking, but I think I see him ease a bit. His thin shoulders relax against the back of his seat, and his grip on the steering wheel slackens. I smile, glad I could help alleviate the situation, if even just a little bit. I still wonder why it had mattered so much to him, why we'd been talking about this for at least four songs now. I begin to glance out the window again, but he asks me where he needs to turn off for the new coffee shop we're going to try. I tell him to not worry, to trust me and my impeccable direction-giving.

"You'd have us driving into the river if I do that," he says, his dry laughter weaving through his words and making me smile so wide. I always like when he laughs, when he gives

me that toothy grin, even if it's at my own expense.

"No, that's *your* directions," I tease back, shifting in the seat until I'm facing him fully. "*You're* the one with a death wish here, not me."

He makes some snide remark about my driving, how anyone getting in the car with me behind the wheel is the one with a definite death wish, and I pretend to get mad, but I'm not really. We both know that. It's just part of our thing.

Our stupid, stupid, unsaid thing.

Loss is Loss

Alexus McDonald

In the heart of New Orleans, it seemed as if you had been pitched into another time.

Bricks lined the streets, reminiscent of the carriages that horses once pulled through them. The buildings stood tall and proud, their paint chipped and faded. The iron-wrought gates that surrounded many were coated in rust.

Homeless children sprinted through the streets, laughing and shoving one another as they searched for their next meals. Those that had family were pulled closer, warned not to stray too far lest they be snatched from their mother's loving arms.

Tourists from all over the country found themselves in the French Quarter, admiring the ageless art and timeless cuisine. Crawfish, gumbo, jambalaya—to a northerner, it was exquisite. The thrill of cracking open a mudbug was an adventure. The indescribable taste of gumbo filled them with an emotion just as inexplicable.

The natives of New Orleans boasted, every corner

claiming that they had the best gumbo in the city. Street performers showed off their tricks much to the amazement of those who had traveled.

At night, the city became alive. Skyscrapers touched the sky, their lights rivaling the stars themselves. The yellow warmth of streetlamps spilled onto walkways, illuminating those who found more serenity in the cover of darkness than the bustle and business of the day.

On Bourbon Street, the stench of alcohol pierced the air. The homeless populated the area. The number of street performers doubled. Prostitutes shamelessly displayed their services, and many found themselves lured into their arms, as if by a siren's call.

Others found themselves drifting into bars, the heart of parties, the arms of strangers.

Kaliska sat at the Riverwalk, a place not far from the French Quarter. It was a better part of New Orleans, overlooking the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi was beautiful. It was a calm river with rippling patches of water here and there.

The wind pulled at her hair, strands of curls falling into her eyes. She pushed them back as she watched the water move.

At night, the city came alive. But the bright, shining city lights did not block out the stars with as much smog as New York had. Against the night, the river reflected the stars, pin-pricks of light dancing on its surface.

A sigh escaped Kaliska's lips as she put her hand on the cold metal railing. Chance would have loved this, she was sure. He would have loved Bourbon Street, more than anything.

But try as she might, Kaliska could not summon him. He was gone, and though she often felt the echo of his laughter against the wind and caught glimpses of his bright smile out of the corners of her eyes every so often, she could not deny that he was gone.

So Kaliska closed her eyes. They had always wanted to come to New Orleans together, the City of Lights. And so Kaliska would make that happen. Because even though Chance was dead, a piece of his soul remained in her heart. And that was real.

"Kali."

Kaliska opened her eyes. The boy that stood before her was young, no more than seventeen, whereas Kaliska had become a woman now in her late twenties. The smile he gave her was just as she remembered. Charming and carefree, a smile that said he had no fear of getting into trouble if it meant he'd had fun doing it.

"Let's go see New Orleans, yeah?"

Kaliska put her hands on the wheels of her chair and pulled away from the railing. "Why do I have the feeling you're not supposed to be here?"

Chance rubbed the back of his neck, his smile faltering. "Who's to say I am here? I'm part of you. Always."

So Kaliska had managed to pull that piece of Chance—that remnant of his soul—from her own. She returned his smile. "Alright. Let's go to the French Quarter."

And so they went. Chance walked by Kaliska as she wheeled herself. The lights from the stars, the skyscrapers, and the city spilled over them, creating a mosaic upon their skin as they walked into the night. For once, the grief that Kalis-

ka carried with her had lifted.

It is the same, Kaliska thought. You can lose friends, family—you can be pushed away, rejected, or simply abandoned, intentionally or not, but you can also have them taken from you. Death takes many forms. The hand of Death is indifferent. But it is the same. Loss is loss. But you cannot call it loss without there having once been love.

And it is that love that gives us the strength to endure. It is that love that allows us to go on without our losses.

Because loss is loss. But love is strength.

An Old Man and His Muse

Savannah Thompson

She was crazy, that girl. She was passionate and mean. She was driven. I only knew this girl for a short time, but in that time, I was changed, utterly and indefinitely.

I saw so much of her that year. The year I turned 17. I remember the first time I saw her standing next to a pile of books. She was unusual in her appearance, and she struck me as odd: an unconventional beauty. I didn't speak to her that first day nor the second nor third. She had a way of intimidating almost everyone, and it wasn't because of the way she looked. She intimidated people with the way she held herself and the aura of her person. Even though I'd never spoken to her, I knew she didn't suffer from a meek disposition.

I was young and I came to think of myself as in love with that girl. Though I'd never spoken to her, I knew she was different.

When I finally did bring myself to say hello, I was not disappointed in the way she raised a brow and replied tersely. I smile to myself now, remembering how odd we found one another. Had we not a mutual love for literature, I would not have stood

a chance in winning her affections, platonic ones at that. I felt gifted by her presence. She was a rare kind of soul. She always said she had a sense of nostalgia for things she'd never known. She was often lost in thought, never caring if she unintentionally ignored someone. I was only ever brave enough to ask her what she was thinking once. Her reply made me realize that she was a three-dimensional type of person. She knew the difference between waking and dreaming, but she always preferred one over the other.

I think I did love that girl. That girl with the sharp tongue, gifted to her by time and pain. She was real and not without flaw. She was broken in many ways but whole in so many others. The strength she possessed was hard-won. She wasn't impartial to the suffering of others, but she had so much pain of her own.

I learned so much about that girl and at the same time, nothing at all. She was a mystery and an open book in one. I knew of her suffering but only that she had suffered. I knew her without really knowing her, and I was okay with that. She wanted all the things she had never had. For most this meant bitterness and jealousy, but for her it was only the dull ache for what could have been.

When I think of her now, I wonder if she really was just a girl or something else altogether. By now, her face isn't as easy to recall, and I'm no longer looking for it in crowds. The days without her turned to years, and now it's been decades. She disappeared just as quickly as she appeared. Yet I still feel pride in having known someone like her. She was phantom-like, and it made her hat much more otherworldly.

I was changed in many ways by this wonderfully strange girl.

I still find myself thinking of her when I need inspiration for a story, an old man and his muse.

Bodies of Water

Cheramié Kravitz

Her hands were so pale under the water. How long had she been sitting here, keeping her fingers tangled in dark brown hair? Bubbles had stopped popping on the water's surface so long ago, but she couldn't bring herself to let go. To see those delicate honey-toned faces without their rosy cheeks, their lips stained pale blue.

She sobbed, pulling her shivering hands to her chest, the sound caught in her throat. Oh God, what had she done? Her thoughts spun, picking away at the last bits of her lingering anger like starving vultures. What had she done? The limp bodies of her precious little ones cried for comfort that she could no longer give. What had she done?

She screamed into the night air, an animalistic sound that even set the moon off-balance. What kind of mother... what kind of monster could have done what she did? She was the one true solace of her sweet babes, and she had become their one true demise. They were her last loves, the lights of her heart, but now, she was truly and utterly alone, her sunshine gone. No more days full of play or songs sung by sweet sopra-

no voices not yet grown into their own.

End it.

You deserve to end it.

The voice spoke from somewhere within herself, just a shadow of a thing. But it grew, and it grew, filled her empty husk with screams.

You need to end it.

She dug her cold fingers into the solid earth around her, trying to grab hold of some form of reality. The voice wasn't real. It wasn't real. This was a dream, and she'd wake up in the morning to sunlight streaming through her window.

End it now.

She choked back a cry, dragging her tired body to the dark water, the only light coming from the moon and dull stars above. The ground grew soft as she got closer and closer, warm dirt already laying claim to her angels.

Keep going.

She brought herself to stand on shaky legs, her dress

stained with dark earth and mucky water. Her steps were slow, and the river opened its arms out to her, accepting each step as if it was welcoming her home. Each step took her farther, deeper, colder, and the voice rung like a drum inside her head.

End it.

She let herself fall backwards, closing her eyes against the black sky. The water enveloped her, pulling her closer and closer to whatever awaited her on the other side of the deep blue.

The Game Warden

Hannah Worley

The tall, gruff man strode between the crowded jail cells. Normally, he didn't like to project how he felt. The prisoners could see it after all, but today, the man allowed himself a slight, crooked grin. Today, he finally caught the big one— Today, well, today was probably going to be the best day of the warden's life—aside from getting married, having two kids, and winning that fishing tournament a couple years back, but you know what I mean.

The warden glared at the prisoners as he walked by, daring them to ruin his good mood. They didn't. But then again, this wasn't an ordinary prison. No, in Hasbro State Penitentiary, the kind of criminals that were locked within these concrete walls were those whose criminal offenses violated the sanctity of the humble board game. You've got your basic charges of loaded dice and counting cards, leading up to one of the most heinous crimes of all: table-flipping. While this may seem ridiculous at first, ask yourself how many times a Twister match becomes twisted, when Risk has become far too risky, or when Operation lands you in the emergency room. Clearly, this commune

of crazed criminals need a prison all their own.

As the warden walked, the faces of the various prisoners peered through their bars. From the looks on their faces, most of the other inmates already knew that their boss' days of dangerous delinquency had caught up with him. A few notable faces stood out to the warden. There were the quadruplets that made up the Hippo gang, their hunger for power proving to be their inevitable downfall. After them was the unsavory Lord Licorice, a bitter man who turned to crime after the sweet taste of victory was taken away from him one too many times. Colonel Mustard shot the warden a dirty look, most likely imagining bludgeoning him with a candlestick or a wrench. The colonel was the boss' right hand man and was arrested at about the same time. And to think, the conviction would've been a trivial pursuit if the detectives on the case weren't able to successfully lay their mouse trap for the boss to fall into. But as clever and conniving as his enemy was, everyone slips down the chute eventually.

Finally, the warden reached his destination: solitary confinement. Inside, the most dangerous and notorious game-related criminal sat, and the warden was excited to rub his victory in

his face.

"Well, well, well— it's about damn time you finally got caught,"
The warden chuckled as he opened the door and stepped through.

At hearing the warden's voice, the prisoner turned. He was an older man with a bushy white mustache and an old timey striped prison uniform—which was strange considering that the penitentiary issued orange jumpsuits to its inmates. Even stranger, he was also equipped with a large ball and chain strapped to his foot which hadn't been used in decades.

Despite being in arguably the worst cell imaginable, the prisoner smiled back confidently at the warden, as if he was the one in charge.

"Gloat all you want, Parker. I'll be out of here and back to my Illinois Avenue safe house in no time." He paused to snicker, "Or did you forget just exactly how much power I have over this board?"

Then, the warden did something surprising. He let out a genuine laugh. Understandably, this caught the prisoner off-guard and put a pause in his cocky facade.

"Ohh no, Pennybags— Not this time," the warden bellowed. "All your little 'get out of jail free cards' are gone. This time you won't be able to trade or buy your way out. We got a confession that'll be sure to bankrupt you once and for all. Don't even think about complaining to the Community Chest or trying to appeal for another Chance. It's over." The warden gestured to the drab walls of the lonely cell with his unsettling smile, "You're on my property now! And it's time to pay up!" He laughed again, this time letting his voice eek out every last bit of malice the warden felt for his archenemy.

Once he was satisfied, the warden turned and began to stride out of the cell door. He stood in the doorway for a moment before turning back and sneering, "Go directly to jail. Do not pass go, and do not collect \$200." Desperately, in an attempt to once again gain control over his situation, Pennybags shouted, "Don't patronize me! I know my Magie rights! Parker!" But it was far too late for that now. All Pennybags could do was watch with the dawning realization that this was it, the end of his monopolistic monetary mania. The warden had finally caught him, and his game was finally over.

*Holding onto Shattered Memories**2nd place**Melissa Taylor*

She holds onto the hope that every other time something like this has happened, it has all worked out just fine. Every time the fear of what is going on is not quite explainable can vanish when it can be fine without being explained. Sometimes it takes longer than others for it to all fall back into place and feel normal.

She holds onto the phone awaiting information that could make or break her future. There is so much already unknown about the future, and now this is being added on as well? She looks around to make sure no one is looking as she checks her texts.

She holds onto her steering wheel as the truth sets in. Maybe this isn't like every other time. What does that even mean? What part of this is normal? White knuckles take over her focus rather than the road in front of her. What's the speed limit? Does that matter at a time like this? This drive has never been so long.

She holds onto her family member's hand as she takes in the scene around her. Everything is so crisp, and the smell shouldn't be this familiar. This doesn't feel like all the other times she has

stood in this place. There are more faces around. Is the room getting smaller, or are we just shoving more people in here like sardines?

She holds onto the chair handles as strangers come and ask her about her life. They have never asked before. What about this situation makes them think it's okay for them to ask now? The feeling of being alone has clouded her brain. She feels small.

She holds onto the one person's hand that could make this all better. They aren't holding back. Some time alone would be nice, but her presence is oh-so important to those around her. At least that's what she's told. She holds onto old jokes and all of the memories that have suddenly flooded her mind. This is the first time she hasn't felt cloudy in the head.

She holds onto the end of the bed as everyone stands around exchanging glances. Why isn't there an instruction manual for this moment? Every sound is louder in this moment than they have ever been.

She holds onto shoes on the floor of Target. What kind of shoes is she expected to wear? Where was the money for these

shoes going to come from? Her friends urge her to get up and get to the car. Don't worry about the shoes. Leave them. It's not important.

She holds onto her best friend's hand as the unthinkable is happening. All she can think of is how many people are here. She feels pushed aside, but she doesn't have enough willpower to force herself back to the middle where she was told she belongs. Is her makeup holding up? She didn't sleep the night before. The shoes she left on the floor of target were surely more comfortable than these.

She holds onto his t-shirt. The passage of time speeds and slows, and every moment holds a different emotion than the last. There are pieces of emotion everywhere. Isn't that acceptable though? These emotions are normal; at least that's what they are saying. What about a shattered reality is normal?

She holds onto the memories now. Most are happy. Some are blurry. Maybe the tears are clouding them. No. She's not crying anymore. He wouldn't have wanted that. He would've wanted her to fit the pieces of her future together. He would've assured her that her picture would not have matched anyone else's.

*Clothespin**3rd place**Ruben Smith*

They were always inseparable, even when they weren't together, they thought about each other, what the other person was wanting for lunch, if they were thirsty, all the things typical college couples did. When she dyed her hair bright orange, he already knew because he claimed he felt her hair change to the color of fires from deep inside the earth's core. When he bought a surprise birthday gift for her last fall, she said she already knew because she'd been secretly wanting it for the longest and that because of their bond, of course he'd know.

When Thanksgiving came around, the two didn't go home to either's parents. Instead, they stayed in their dorm room and ate ramen noodles and hot dogs sliced lengthwise. He even surprised her with a jar of pickle spears. She held his hand very tight that night, felt the powers of the universe. Christmas came, and they didn't celebrate it because they decided that holidays like Christmas were too religious and sometimes, not religious enough. Valentine's Day was a cash cow, hungry for depressed couples and even more depressed singles to try and attempt to be happy with each other. Easter,

of course, was about how they nailed a rabbit to a cross and that rabbit shits out eggs, so they decided to grab McDonald's the night before and go home to gorge. That's where the story begins and sort of ends, the way a friend tells a story and has no resolution whatsoever, yet you still listened to it anyway.

The couple was happy, of course, never a sad moment in their lives, and they knew each other too much to know when the other was sad. He decided to actually try to apply himself to his school work about three months too late into his third-year spring semester. She had given up by this point and decided it'd be best to just quit school and start her own business of knitting things that weren't for babies. They roamed the campus with each other like they were two hawks preparing to feast upon whatever piece of conversation they became involved in. There was a large array of friends, from those book nerds who philosophize about things that don't apply to them at all to those drunk friends who continuously ask if you have weed or know someone who has weed. The couple moved from friend group to friend group, not knowing where they wanted to be, just knowing that it wasn't at this place or that place.

No one seemed to care about the couple all that much, treated them as an annoyance and ignored them mostly, as people often do. There were times when they felt like they were being ignored, of course, especially by the faculty. He failed his classes for the spring but seemed to not care about it because there was no point to school if school was a capitalist industry, breeding sheep to be slaughtered by an unstable government and worthless jobs. His advisor, a lady who tried her best to keep her composure when he entered the room, told him that if he planned to graduate by next May, he'd need to do summer courses. He disagreed with the help of his girlfriend's presence in his head. She held his hand very tightly the night he learned he failed his classes, all the pressure of a hurricane forced against her skin.

She would often recite poetry to him in the middle of the night, words of some unknown poet, some person that had died and been forgotten, and he'd grab her hair between his fingers and rub like it was a match needing to be extinguished. With him no longer in school, they felt they could spend all the time in the world with one another, no more separation. They would continue to have feelings for each other and went

on with their lives. They mostly slept in, the curtains drawn, no light except the occasional phone screen glimmer, and ate mostly leftovers from other leftovers.

It was in late May when he noticed the horrible smell. It awoke him in the middle of the night, and he tried to find it while she slept naked. He turned over the small table beside the bed, thinking it was a dead rat, went to the bathroom because he thought he forgot to flush the toilet, went to the kitchen because he thought it was some trash that had been piling up by the door. He was wrong on all accounts. The smell stuck with him anywhere he went, any part of the house. When he opened the front door to get some fresh air, he was hit with a powerful wave of fresh air, but still the traces of that odor followed him outside. He cursed loudly and she awoke on the mattress.

She rushed to him, asking him what was wrong, and he nearly gagged when she got near him. She continuously tried to grab on to him, hug him, hold him, but he pushed her away and turned around. She started crying, wanting to know what was wrong with him, why she was being rejected like this, why he was outside, why all the lights were on in the house, why the

table was turned over, why he's sweating, why he's gagging, what the hell was wrong with everything. He looked at her, and she knew then, because of course she'd know, and ran back to the bedroom and slammed the door, her eyes dripping with tears.

He heard the shower turn on and her crying getting louder as he sat on the couch, a clothespin to his nose. He turned on the television and started watching whatever was on, some cooking show about boiling crawfish in Tennessee, some fashion show about how this anklet would look well with that outfit, \$499.99, some hunting show where the man had a limp and was tracking a bear, some cop show where the victim was killed using a syringe full of cough syrup. He tried to find comfort in something on the television, but it bored him too much, and then the smell became a taste in the air. It was metallic and putrid, sort of like rotten bananas or bad milk, maybe both mixed. He gagged on the smell and nearly threw up in the living room. He held his head between his legs and breathed heavily and still, the taste filled his mouth.

He heard the shower turn off, and she came out, still naked. She looked at him and asked if she was okay now, if the

smell had disappeared this time, but when she came into the room and did the swirl in front of the TV, he threw up what was in his stomach onto the floor, the pile spreading around in the carpet. She screamed and started crying again, ranting about how he didn't love her anymore, how he was being an idiot, how the carpet would be stained with bile because of him.

He looked up at her, his own eyes watery with pain, and saw her naked body in front of the TV. It disgusted him, made him feel so sick to his stomach, made him want to eat the vomit already on the floor, made him want to throw up again. And he did just that, another round of throwing up, and this time the bile turned bloody, the stomach juices had started becoming pieces of flesh, those frightful body-building blocks turned up on the floor. She screamed at him that he was repulsed by her, that she was just an ugly nothingness, that she was the problem to all his problems, that she was the pressure she felt when they held hands.

All the nagging hit his eardrums hard, and they began to ring loudly, a sound so high-pitched it scared him. It made him feel pain in the front of his brain, and he vomited again, this time he felt motion sickness while doing it. He threw up and

threw up and threw up. The bloody fragments of his stomach lining lie on the floor around the bloody heap of what food and acid his stomach held. He closed his eyes, but when he did that, he just could see her body again, and he wretched and threw up and dry heaved and vomited.

She screamed and yelled and cried and shrieked and threatened to call the police, but she never did because she was too much in shock, too much in the moment, too much involved in all the pain he was feeling because she could feel that stuff too without doing it. She told him to hold on, to just be patient as she processed what was happening, so she can figure out if he's repulsed by her, or if he's sick, or if he's dying. She ran over and touched his back, her fingers pressing hard against it.

When she did that, he just began losing all the insides of his body onto the floor. His stomach plopped out with a slushy noise as the intestines followed and uncoiled into a coil, then came the rest of his internal organs: his esophagus, his lungs, his spleen, his liver, his bladder, his one kidney he was born with, his pancreas, his gallbladder, his thyroid, his lymph nodes, his blood vessels, his cartilage, his brain, his tes-

tes, his bones, and then, with a loud thud, his heart fell out of his mouth.

Pick Me

Caleb Howell

We were scattered in fields and meadows like sentient particles of frozen water, lying flat in sheets on beds of grass and wintry meaning. The people grew like human allium under trees and through rocks and silt. Chlorophyll arms stretched outwards towards beaming sun and radiant heat like children reaching for their mothers' arms. Noses were disguised by honeybees and human pollen dropping like snowfall from weary eyelashes on round, gold faces. And I wondered, sitting in that field, whether it was my time today.

Who is to say what happens when, hopefully, omnibenevolent petaled rings shift foliage with every step and drop down to pluck human waists from the field? What gods and goddesses armed with luxurious leaves descend upon unsuspecting humanity? What form do they take, and what colors do they sprout?

I stood tall that day and remained still, thinking, "If they choose discriminately, it is better to stand among the thousands and to look as unremarkable as possible." We place great hope in the possibility of kind hearts pulsing ichor and

xylem. I cannot help but feel dread, though. Dread and hope. I do not know what happens after these titans twist anguished stems and pluck green torsos from blessed soil. I heard that we share limited time in the sun as a beautiful bouquet; families and generations of genets and ramets cloistered from nature provide the perfect narrative for the end of days. I stand among many in the field who desire the reprieve of being plucked. Many would give anything for that moment of pain and then saturation of colors and smells in a vase of loved ones. A vase or a tomb. I want so desperately to fling myself into this contingency. But I cannot.

I am not sure if I am afraid of the pain or something else: not being remembered in the space I previously called home or the pointlessness of my time in the field. We grow until we cannot, or we are harvested for something hopefully more. One last time of significance is all I wish for myself. It is the only thing that qualifies my time here, standing amid my cousins. It is the reward of death. How can I hope for oblivion?

How absurd is life without purpose? And how purposeful is it to adorn someone's home? How can I desire to be just another pretty thing that wilts away and is discarded? How can

I continue to be once I relegate myself to being one among many? A blur of white and yellow? A

memory?

I stand straight up and feel my betrayal: the betrayal of commonality. I hope to be singular but not to be singled out. If my petals are too fragrant, my colors too pure, I will be the next light to be darkened. The soil which nurtures me calls for my continuance, but why continue to be? Why continue in a world which calls you most important at the time of your demise? Why do my cousins not see the unfairness that is reality? They sway in the breeze and hope to be plucked only to mean something. Can I not mean something here in the field? I shrug off the dewdrops and shiver in the face of truth. I call out for justice to silence. Am I the only one who feels this way?

They came today and trampled dozens of friends to pick the most colorful and vibrant. Today, I continue to stand in the field. I was left behind. I stand here another day because I am one of a thousand. Indiscernible. Invisible. In my singularity I am plural. I must continue to find meaning and complexity even when avoided for being uninteresting. The loam cushions my head as I lay to rest for another night, but I dream of the reck-

onings to come. It is a nightmare to not know—not know who is left, who is most beautiful to arbitrary eyes, how beautiful and distinctive I am. The grass bends to shield me from nightfall. In the shadows I am wary of moonlight. I am watched by cosmic entities at all times. The silent judgment of greater beings twists my mind into unbearable confusion.

Why is life worth living if living is the worst part? How I wish to bloom if only for a moment, to be beautiful and necessary before I am carried away to rot. I crave that day when I can be the most beautiful flower in the field.

Cthulu Rises from the Ocean, or a Tale of Divorce

Ruben Smith

-Sonia Greene, H.P. Lovecraft's Wife

I can recall many instances when I didn't love my husband; many times he would sit in his chair and speak some form of truth into existence like he was a god. Or that time he struck his fist against the table and a small slit opened wide in the wood. It wasn't until we moved homes, two kids later, and a dead dog in the yard, when I decided that my husband was not the man I fell in love with. He had become something unrecognizable, something driven by fear and madness which ate at him in his sleep.

He used to talk about these grand tentacles stretching down from the jaw of a beast as big as time itself, green hungering for the other things that are alive around it. He said he would have nightmares of the monster, great darkness in the mouth, where sacred monstrosities await beyond the evil itself, commanding followers to enter into the void and become whole.

I think back to our wedding vows, the moment he raised my veil upwards into the sky and told me he would take care of

me until the end of time, but I should not have believed him then. His definition of love was created through pornography and whiskey sours on weekdays, books that were half finished, half begun, wearing lazy cotton and moving furniture around his writing room until he was too tired to even add flesh to the bones of his stories.

He would say the beast would move in hurried motions yet was slow and tired at times; cosmos awaited his command and worlds were to be devoured. He said that this was the most important thing haunting his dreams and that if he had to go and find this monster, he would find it in some bar, some writer hole of pitiful men hungry for answers, the places where the beast might be waiting for him.

I realize now, as he is gone from this world into that dark other, that he can no longer hunt for something that is found, that time hurries onward for the rest of us, sleepless nights of loneliness and hearts aching for what has been lost. I do not shame myself for making this decision for the betterment of myself and for the children, but a decision had to be made all the same. And this is how the monster entered our world through cramped page and bloodied handwriting, birthed by

a man of reason and insanity, cast among the lot and left out
there to await the beast.

The Things They Taught

1st place

Macala Broussard

Her mother taught her that there is a way to do things.

There is a way to cook food. She always rinses the meat at least five times before doing the same to the rice. Adding salt and butter to the rice, she lets the rice pot do its job. The seasoning of the meat follows: first the Tony's, then cayenne pepper, then garlic powder—something extra if she's in the mood. Slaving away over a hot stove, doing five tasks simultaneously and it will still come out perfect. Making sure to cut the onions without a remedy nearby, so the tears that fall will be mistaken for a chemical reaction.

There is a way to wash dishes. She rinses the dishes beforehand, making sure they won't ruin the water before the process is complete. She will wash the sink with hot water and soap before filling it up again. The water must be scorching hot before adding dishwashing liquid and mixing it in, making sure the soap is bubbly enough to last. She will scrub and scrub: the cups twice, the bowls three times, and if they are really stained, four. She will reach for a mug that is no longer there. Pots are scrubbed until her hands are red and pruny; no matter

how long she spends trying to wipe away the black stains, they do not fade. She cleans, she scrubs, she mops the floor until she sees her reflection in the tile. Make sure to get inside every crevice, or it isn't clean, isn't complete. Everything must look nice and clean on the outside. She still aches.

There is a way to take pictures: be the subject, or be the photographer. She prefers being behind the camera, the one taking the shots, the one saying, 'say cheese,' the one who doesn't have to pretend to smile on the other side of the lens. She loves to gather us around for a family picture. This Easter it won't be the same. There will be someone missing from the picture.

There is a way to avoid the topic. There will be an empty space in the booth, and they'll pretend not to notice. There will be more leftovers than there ever were. There will be one less hug and kiss goodnight.

There is a way to tell children that their father has moved out of the house. Keep it a secret until he tells them himself. Instead of him coming clean, a boy on the bus will tell them he lives in another town, because in small towns everyone will know your business, even when they do not know you. They will deny it and ask her why the boy would come up with such a thing.

Then, and only then, will she tell them the truth. That daddy packed his things two weeks ago, and he has only been home after school to see his children. That he made it so they would never know the difference between a workaholic and an absent father because those stories are pretty damn close.

Her father taught her that there is a way to do things.

There is a way to be successful. Work hard. Provide for your family. Do everything you can. Sometimes work will take you away from your family, but it's okay—they'll understand.

There is a way to be there without being there. Make every basketball game, every football game, every track meet. Buy presents for the birthdays and the holidays—chocolate's on Valentine's Day. Be there for the big things and hope they don't sweat the small stuff.

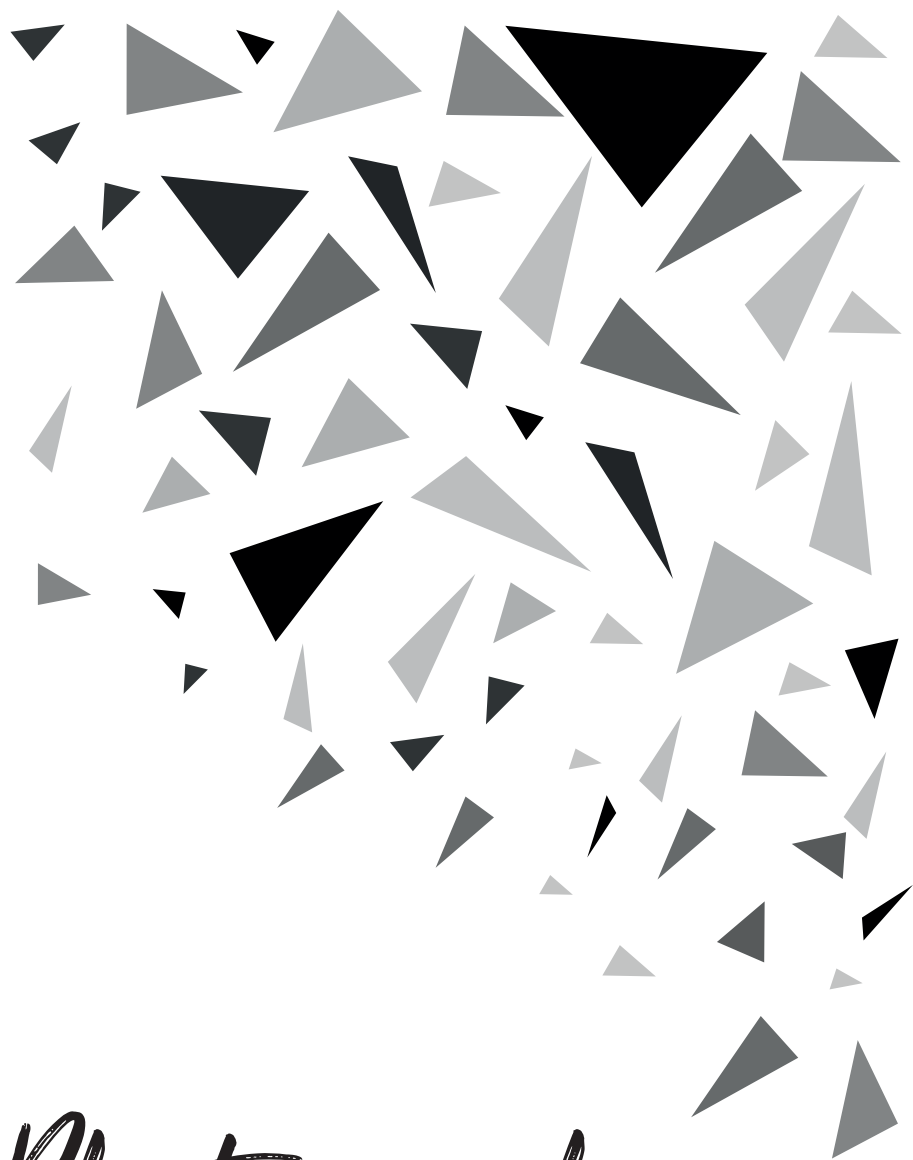
There is a way to explain why a man left his home, why a husband left his wife, why a father would leave his children. When asked by his daughter why he left he will avoid her eyes while lying between his teeth. Spew bullshit about money and bills becoming too much. Discuss how the state of a house, monetary things, temporary things could drive him to make such a

decision. He will make sure to be completely ignorant of how selfish he sounds. Do not notice the tears in her eyes or ignore them. She will say okay, she will hug him and say she loves him, all the while questioning every decision she has made up to that point. She will wonder if she could've done anything to change it. She will wonder why daddy couldn't look her in the eyes, why he would choose to lie, and she won't be able to decide which one is worse. Because money can be worked out, a house can be rebuilt, but trust goes deep. It's not easy to gain, and it's even harder, if not impossible, to get back.

There is a way to lose a daughter's trust. There is a way to break a daughter's heart. A father can cheat on a mother. Decide he doesn't want to stay with her anymore. Move out of the house and barely see his children. When he does, he will be sure to mess with her mother's mind because isn't that what sad excuses for men do. Make her mother cry. Hurt the woman who raised her with his actions, with a paragraph, with a sentence, with ten words. That mother will lay next to her daughter, but instead of comforting, she will be the one who is being comforted. She will apologize for being hurt, for being sad, for being angry, for being emotional. She will apologize for things

that will never need an apology. She will apologize for being human. This daughter will say that it's okay. Years will pass before the thought of forgiveness doesn't make her flinch.

This is the first time her mother has ever cried in her arms, and she will cry, too.



Photography

1st Place



Grow
Olivia Slayter

2nd Place



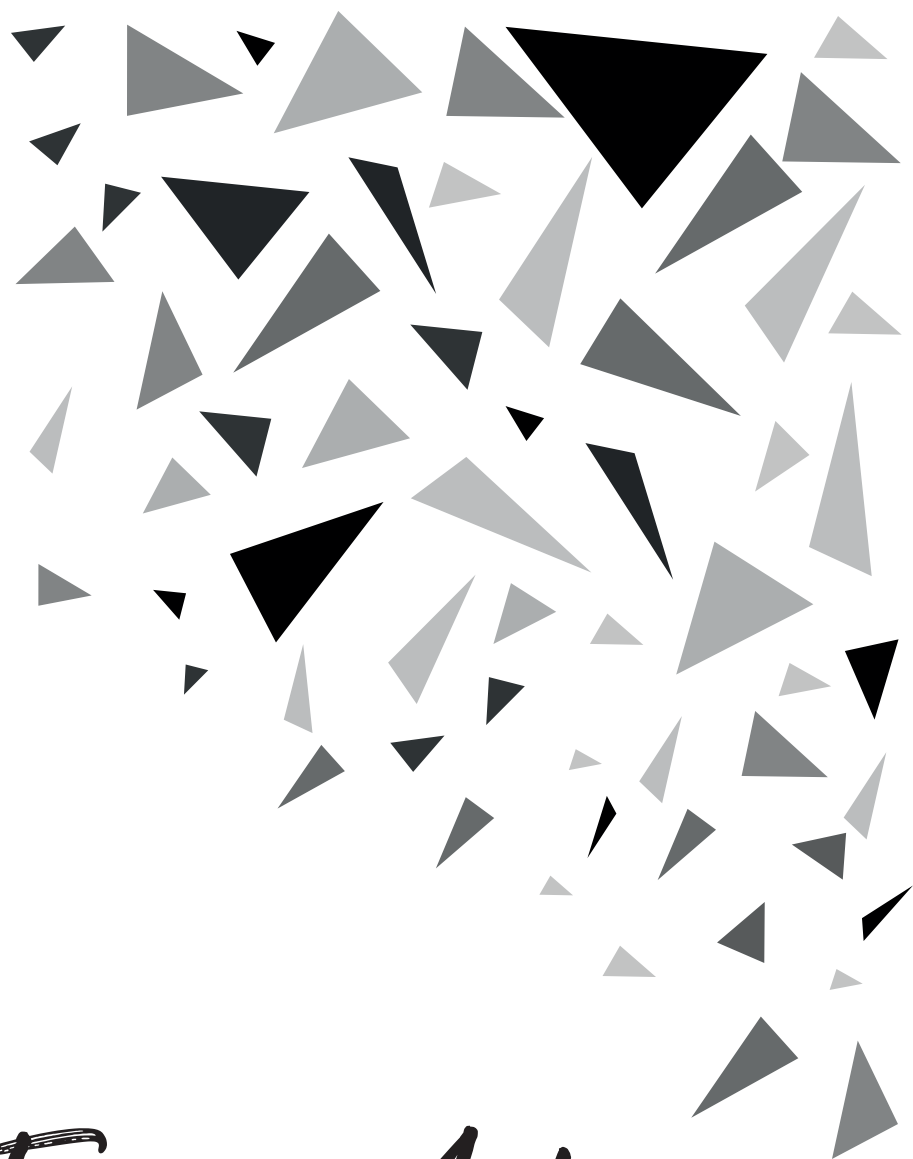
French Quarter

Sean McGraw

3rd Place



*Guadi's Mosaic
Madison Szekely*



Fine Arts

1st Place



A Shattered Mirror's Reflection

Layla Easley

2nd Place



E.DAWSON

Plant Design
Emily Dawson

3rd Place



Roller Skates
Tiffany McClinton